

John Chapter 12

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We read in John 11 that Jesus has withdrawn

John 11:54 (NIV) Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead, he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

And that the high priest has set a price on his head

John 11:57 (NIV) But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

Into this atmosphere, Jesus comes to celebrate openly.

Before the Passover, Jesus comes to a place just outside the capital city and becomes the guest of honour at a party. Given the standing of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, this was not a quiet get together, but one in which the area around would know of!

Possible Backgrounds

"We know little about the background of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. They may have been well-to-do orphans who had the management of their own lives since there is no mention of their parents. Moreover, the eldest of the three, Martha, appeared to be in control of the household.

They seemed to be affluent. They had a house large enough to accommodate many people, as their hospitality to Jesus and his group of friends shows. They appeared to have no occupation. Mary could afford to buy a very expensive perfume called nard. It was a special gift, not an everyday item, but it showed they were people of means.

None of the three appeared to be married. This was unusual in Jewish society, where people were usually married before the age of 20. It

may mean that they were quite young, perhaps still in their teens, or that they were on the edge of society, and not acceptable in some way. In any case, they seem to have been young, comparatively well-off, independent, and intelligent."-(
<http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/martha-mary/>)

There are however other interpretations of the information given in the Bible, in one "Matthew, Mark and John all agree that our Lord was anointed in Bethany, and Matthew and Mark specify (presuming the same occasion is referred to) that it took place in the house of Simon, the leper. Since Jesus was received into Martha's house in the Lucan record, and Martha served at the supper in Simon's house at Bethany during which Mary anointed our Lord, it has been supposed that Martha was the wife (or even the widow) of Simon. The lead she takes on both occasions suggests that she was the elder sister."- S. S. Smalley

"As we look at this event, we see some "representative people" who are examples to us. Martha represents work as she served the dinner she had prepared for the Lord. This was just as much a "fragrant offering" as was Mary's ointment (see Heb. 13:16). Mary represents worship, and Lazarus represents witness (John 11:9-11). People went to Bethany just to be able to see this man who had been raised from the dead."-Warren W. Wiersbe

Martha- Work- The Woman who found herself in the Kitchen
The woman who found herself, in the Kitchen.

In an earlier message, I highlighted the point that in John 10 Martha complained about her workload, I explained, that one action, "sitting and listening" is not better than "serving in the kitchen", but the attitude behind it is?

Martha was being rebuked because she has found herself in the kitchen and yet is unhappy in the fact; she is not settled, and therefore her service fails to bring God the honour it could!

Mary is commended, not for listening to Jesus per se, but for finding the right attitude of heart to her choice of actions. She is willing to suffer social taboo and censure so she can follow God's heart for her. Mary has "found" herself

Sacred

We now find a very different Martha, she is still in the kitchen, but no word of complaint. Mary still crosses social boundaries, performing an intimate act, that of anointing Jesus' feet and cleaning him with her hair.

In this scene, we step into the sacred. It is, post the resurrection of Lazarus, the household has been through much emotional time, and yet through it, they now have an understanding of who Jesus is, what he is capable of, and one could argue, the foresight of what he is about to do to make all this possible.

Before and After- Found in the resurrection. Martha has been found in the process of the resurrection of her brother.

In this sacredness, Martha serves as a deacon and Mary as a priest!

Harmony

We find that they now have a harmony between the family and Christ, Harmony between the two sisters (and Lazarus), both are happy with what the other is doing.

"It seems evident that the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work. Blessed are the balanced!"
Warren W. Wiersbe

"Then what is God's alternative? If we aren't to grow by self-effort, how do we grow? Jesus' answer comes as we see Him help the disciples develop an attitude, not of activism, but of dependence." -
Larry Richards and Lawrence O. Richards

Satisfaction

So finally Martha is at peace, she has found satisfaction, she has "found herself", in the kitchen.

Mary- Worship, a humble woman, and extravagant priest.

I am not suggesting the Mary thought of herself as a priest, no more than when the Father uses Mary Magdalene in the garden to become the first evangelist of the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. In the records of this event in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 and John we see that Mary anoints Jesus head and feet with perfume.

In this instance, John concentrates on the aspect of Mary anointing Jesus' feet.

" There is no clear evidence that Mary or anyone else understood before the cross that Jesus had to die. She meant this to be an act of costly, humble devotion, but like Caiaphas (11:49-52) she signalled more than she knew. In the culture of the day, it was not thought inappropriate to spend lavish sums at a funeral, including the cost of the perfumes that were designed to stifle the smell of decay (cf. notes on 11:39). But here was Mary, lavishly pouring out perfume on Jesus while he was yet alive. Small wonder Jesus sees it as a prefiguring of the anointing that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus performed (19:38-42). "-D. A. Carson

Teaching of humility and placing her glory at his feet.

"When she came to the feet of Jesus, Mary took the place of a slave. When she undid her hair (something Jewish women did not do in public), she humbled herself and laid her glory at His feet (see 1 Cor. 11:15). Of course, she was misunderstood and criticized; but that is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to the Lord."Warren W. Wiersbe,

We see an act of extravagance; An act extended far beyond the actual event.

Cost of Finances.

"The sum was enormous. Either Mary and her family were very wealthy, or perhaps this was a family heirloom that had been passed down to her.

Mention of the fact that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume suggests not only extravagant love (Lindars, p. 417), but suggests that the fragrance of the act will extend far beyond the event itself (cf. Mk. 14:9). "- D. A. Carson

Like David, Mary would not give to the Lord that which cost her nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). Her beautiful act of worship brought a fragrance to the very house in which they were dining, and the blessing of her deed has spread around the world (Matt. 26:13; Mark 14:9). Little did Mary realize that night that her love for Christ would be a blessing to believers around the world for centuries to come! What Mary did was a blessing to Jesus and a blessing to her own life. She was also a blessing to the home, filling it with fragrance (see Phil. 4:18); and today, she is a blessing to the church around the world. Her one act of devotion in the little village of Bethany still sends "ripples of blessing."- Warren W. Wiersbe

Opposition- Interestingly we now have the first words recorded of Judas. A person who masquerades a wrong heart in good words.

" John 12:4 records Judas' first words found anywhere in the four Gospels. "-Warren W. Wiersbe

"Either way, Judas displays a certain utilitarianism that pits pragmatic compassion, concern for the poor, against extravagant, unqualified devotion. If self-righteous piety sometimes snuffs out genuine compassion, it must also be admitted, with shame, that social activism, even that which meets real needs, sometimes masks a spirit that knows nothing of worship and adoration.

With Judas Iscariot, the case is far worse: his personal greed for material things masquerades as altruism. Like the hired hand, he cares nothing for the sheep (10:13). Because he was the treasurer of the apostolic band, the keeper of the money bag, probably he hoped such gifts as this nard could in future be turned into cash, to which he

could then help himself. The money bag was doubtless used to meet the disciples' needs, and also to provide alms to the poor. Normally it was replenished by disciples who cherished Jesus' ministry, like the women mentioned in Luke 8:2, 3. The last clause could almost be taken to mean that Judas used to 'carry' (bastazō) what was put in, but in the right contexts the verb means 'steal' or 'pilfer'—not unlike the verb 'lift' in the United Kingdom. This is the only place in the New Testament where Judas is called a thief—indeed, where any charge other than Judas' ultimate betrayal is levelled against him. Yet the charge is believable: anyone who would betray another person for thirty pieces of silver has an unhealthy avarice for material things.”-
D. A. Carson

We should see how Jesus reacts. After enduring many personal insults without rebuke, Jesus steps up when Judas Iscariot attacks the thing that Mary is doing. We should always remember that nothing we do for God is overlooked by God. When the world fails to see why and how we work the kingdom of God out, Jesus does not. He notices He acknowledges, He is pleased. More over, when our character is attacked, either publicly or in the realms of heaven by Satan (see Job), Jesus stands for us, he is our protector and speaks for us.

Romans 8:34

"Who then will condemn us? No one--for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honour at God's right hand, pleading for us."

Lazarus-A Silent Witness

People who will not accept the evidence will try to get rid of it, but "life finds a way", our witness, if shown will affect people.

"As mentioned we have no recorded words from Lazarus in the New Testament, but his miraculous life was an effective witness for Jesus Christ. (In contrast, John the Baptist did no miracles, yet his words brought people to Jesus. See John 10:40–42.) We today ought to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) because we have been "raised from the dead" (Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 3:1ff). Actually, the Christian life ought to be a beautiful balance of worship, work, and witness.

But the fact that Lazarus was a walking miracle put him into a place of danger: the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him as well as Jesus! Our Lord was right when He called them children of the devil, for they were murderers indeed (John 8:42–44). They threw the healed blind man out of the synagogue rather than permit him to bear witness to Christ every Sabbath, and they tried to put Lazarus back into the tomb because he was leading people to faith in Christ. If you will not accept the evidence, you must try to get rid of it!

This quiet evening of fellowship—in spite of the cruel way the disciples treated Mary—must have brought special encouragement and strength to the Saviour’s heart as He faced the demands of that last week before the Cross. We should examine our own hearts and homes to ask whether we are bringing joy to His heart by our worship, work, and witness.” Warren W. Wiersbe

III- The painting of the "last supper."

How did Jesus feel when the Father organised this “blessing “ for his life?

We can often overlook the human nature of “The Christ.” Jesus receives honour with grace. Blessing with humility. We should do the same.

This blessing signifies and points towards the upcoming trial and death and resurrection of Christ, but points towards a “tableau” of the Kingdom. If we consider what is going on, one woman has found peace in service, another has blessed and anointed the body of Jesus, in humble extravagance, and the future for all is revealed in Lazarus, that which was once dead is now alive.

How do we react to God bringing things into our life? Let us make sure we see the moments for what they are!

Many times we can be asked to step up and bless others. Hopefully, we do. Other times we can ask to “be blessed”, are we willing to accept these gifts from others.

Jesus re iterates and challenges, Liar lunatic or Lord.

Were a mere mortal to claim such priority, he would be very ill or unspeakably arrogant. Jesus speaks this way as a matter of course, not only because he sees his cross and burial on the near horizon, but also because he knows he is to receive the same honour that is due the Father (5:23).

D. A. Carson,

Our lives and invited to become part of God's tableau of the Kingdom, are we seeing this calling upon our life.